

Soil riddles: February 2026

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AI-generated image courtesy of ChatGPT.

Think you know soils? Test your knowledge in our new series, "Soil Riddles."

If you are the first to guess the correct soil series name and its geographical location correctly, we'll publish your name along with the answer in an upcoming issue.

Amazing soils are all around us. We see some quite often while others only on special occasions or during a once in a lifetime trip. My wife, daughter, and I love to travel and have had the opportunity to visit some bizarrely interesting soils. My wife and I are both soil scientists and know very well how excited soil scientists get when trying to identify a soil from a photo or even just a partial core.

In that spirit, I thought it would be fun for some of you to test your soils knowledge. Each month, I will share a new riddle in *CSA News*. If you are the first to guess the correct **soil series name** and its **geographical location**, I will publish your name along with the answer in an upcoming issue. [Email your answers to me](#) with the subject line "*Soil Riddles February 2026.*"

Soil Riddle 1

Basalt weathered and water carried me down,

To a high desert basin, flat and brown.

The river laid my parent on the valley floor,

Where scant organics built my A horizon's core.

*Rain leached the surface, though little would fall,
Creating my E, a pale eluvial where minerals fall.
Sodium dispersed my clays, built columns so grand,
A natric Btn horizon, by sodium's hand.*

*Then carbonates gathered where salts would accrue,
My Btnkz and Bkz, where the "k" and "z" grew.
Superactive clays with mixed mineralogy,
Fine-loamy textures mark my upper morphology.*

*But coarser alluvium lay waiting below,
Sandy or sandy-skeletal, a contrasting show.
The water table rose with snowmelt each spring,
Then dropped in summer, a seasonal swing.*

*In 2Cg depths, gray colors took hold,
Where oxygen fled and reduction was bold.
Aquic conditions beneath arid skies,*

A frigid Natrargid where the water table lies.

What is my series name, and where do I lie?

Soil Riddle 2

The mountains crumbled, rock by rock,

Granite, gneiss, and schist from the mountain's block.

Volcanics joined with sandstone and shale,

Colluvium crept down the mountain's trail.

Needles and bark fell year after year,

Slightly decomposed, an Oi veneer.

Beneath it, Oe turned darker still,

Partially rotted by fungal will.

A thin dark A formed where organics would blend,

But snowmelt and rain had more work to send.

They leached the minerals, left colors pale,

An albic E horizon, ashen and frail.

Below, the clays began to accrue,

But eluvial tongues kept pushing through.

An E/B mix, my glossic display,

Where Glossocryalf processes hold sway.

The clays washed downward, illuviation's art,

Smectitic minerals, swelling apart.

In Bt1 and Bt2, the argillic domain,

Clayey-skeletal textures from rock that remain.

At last, my C horizon waits below,

Weathered colluvium, the parent tableau.

Ustic moisture beneath cryic cold,

On mountain slopes where Douglas-fir take hold.

The soil in Riddle 1 is my cousin, you know,

I see them in the basin far below,

While their vegetation is meager and scant at best,

mine stands gnarly and tall, except against the avalanche test.

What is my series name, and on which slopes do I form?

[Email answer\(s\)](#)

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